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The Marvelous in the Life and Thought of Proclus

Like many biographies of the same period, the *Life of Proclus* by his disciple Marinos abounds in prodigies. Yet Proclus is a thinker of stature and a critical mind. It is therefore of interest to ask what interpretation this philosopher offers of this marvelous element, or again, how he reconciles his devotion with his reflection.

We must first recall the principal facts as Marinos describes them, then show, through a few texts, how Proclus understands certain prodigies — particularly divine visions and auditions — and finally attempt to connect these explanations to the theory Proclus maintains regarding the imagination as an activity of *a priori* schematization.

1. The Facts

Such a problem would not arise in the case of Plotinus. When one moves from the *Life of Plotinus* by Porphyry to that of Proclus by Marinos, one feels the contrast keenly. To be sure, there is a marvelous element in the *Life of Plotinus*, but it remains fairly discreet. Porphyry would no doubt have introduced more of it had he given free rein to his personal tastes and to those of his age. But he could not do so without feeling guilty toward his master. Plotinus manifestly had little regard for prodigies of any kind, or for the practices designed to provoke them. Either he refused outright to have anything to do with them, as in the famous reply to Amelius that scandalized his listeners,[1] or else he went along with them while keeping his distance. It was, it seems, this latter attitude that Plotinus adopted at the evocation of his guardian spirit in the Iseum at Rome.[2] Porphyry refers here to Plotinus's treatise on 'the guardian spirit allotted to us'.[3] But it is precisely in this treatise that Plotinus is at pains to show that this thesis grounds no prodigy whatsoever. Likewise, in the treatise 'On Fate'[1] and in that 'On the Influence of the Stars',[2] he maintains that

astrological predictions and the spells of sorcery rest on the close interdependence of the elements of the universe.

Porphyry gives the impression of always lagging a little behind his master's positions. If he appears rather 'rationalist' to his disciple Iamblichus, this is because he is outstripped by the impetus this theologian of theurgy gives to the school. Porphyry would remain, all his life, divided between his devotion and his Plotinian fidelity.

Marinos was not held back by the same scruples. Not only, he tells us, did Proclus distrust neither invocations nor evocations, but he plainly delighted in them. He would recount to his intimates, with emotion and even with tears,[3] the particular favors he had received from the gods. He solicited them. While he was feeling the first pains of gout, and had put a small compress on his afflicted foot, a sparrow suddenly snatched away the dressing. This was, Marinos assures us, a symbol and a divine promise of healing. But the master did not consider himself reassured, and asked the gods for a clearer sign. It was then that he saw in a dream a messenger from Epidaurus leaning over his knees. He then had full confidence in his recovery, and he was healed for good.[4]

Proclus was a rigorous and eclectic practitioner of cult. He honoured the gods of the East as much as the gods of Greece. He wished to be 'the hierophant of the whole world'.[5] He thus accumulated, into an advanced age, the abstentions, ascetic exercises, exorcisms, and purifications of multiple cults. He observed their feast-days exactly and composed hymns in honour of the gods. The recitation of these hymns soothed his sufferings when he was ill.[6]

Proclus had received communication of Chaldean theurgic secrets from Asclepigeneia, daughter of his teacher Plutarch of Athens.[7] She held them from the 'great Nestorius,' who himself must have been a disciple of Iamblichus. According to Étienne Évrard, in his study *Le maître de Plutarque d'Athènes et les origines du néo-platonisme athénien* [The Teacher of Plutarch of Athens and the Origins of Athenian Neoplatonism],[8] there would have been two Nestoriuses, and this 'great Nestorius' would not be the father of Plutarch, who is said to have kept a certain reserve with regard to theurgy. There would thus be two currents within the school of Athens: that of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Plutarch, less ritualistic, and that of Iamblichus, Nestorius, Syrianus, and Proclus, more hieratic.

This same Asclepigeneia was healed by Proclus's prayer. She was gravely ill and had been given up by the physicians. Her mother, Archiadēs, turned to the philosopher as a last resort. He set himself to prayer 'in the ancient manner' (τὸν ἀρχαιότερον τρόπον, lit. 'the more ancient fashion/manner') in the temple of Asclepius, and, while he was praying, the young girl was suddenly healed. Proclus had not had far to go, since he lived quite close to the Asclepieion and the Theatre of Dionysus, southeast of the Acropolis, in a house he held from Plutarch and Syrianus.[1]

Proclus was favored with numerous divine apparitions, whether in dreams or in the waking state. He saw Athena at least twice. The first time, in his youth, the goddess

revealed to him his philosophical vocation.[2] The second time, much later, at the moment when the statue of Athena was removed from the Parthenon 'by those who move even the unmoved things' (ὑπὸ τῶν καὶ τὰ ἀκίνητα κινούντων, lit. 'by those who move even the immovable things').[3] The goddess appeared to him in a dream and declared that she had chosen henceforth to dwell in his house, thereby entrusting him with the mission of defending Hellenic wisdom against the innovators.

While he was ill, Proclus, still a child, was healed by an apparition of the young Telesphorus, who, after naming himself, touched his head.[4] And in his final illness he was relieved by Asclepius, who manifested himself to him in a half-sleep in the form of a dragon (a serpent — the traditional emblem of Asclepius) coiling about his head. He would then have recovered his health, Marinos tells us, had he not desired death and refused his body the care it needed.[5]

One day he heard the god of the Adrottians (probably Asclepius) pronounce this oracle: 'Proclus is the glory of the city.'[6] Adrotta is described by Stephanus of Byzantium as a city of Lydia, in Asia Minor, near the sea and situated on a steep height. Proclus is said to have revived there an ancient and forgotten cult.[7]

Finally, our philosopher succeeded in bringing on a rain that put an end to an overly long drought, and he furnished effective means for warding off earthquakes.[1] He thus possessed the art of foreseeing earthquakes — an art we have lost.

2. Proclus's Interpretation

Faced with this profusion of the marvelous, a few very simple explanations come to mind. Let us first run through the inadequate interpretations.

One may rightly say: this is the taste of the age. People lived in daily contact with gods and daimons. Hence theurgy and magic. But, like Plotinus, Proclus had a personality strong enough to react against his milieu.

One may further rightly add: this is a literary genre. The veneration one bore toward a master required that prodigies be attributed to him. This is what we find, for example, in the *Lives* of Pythagoras and of Plato, and even in that of Isidore by Damascius, who was not especially credulous. There are stereotyped prodigies, such as the luminous halo that Rufinus perceives around the head of the professor Proclus[2] and which recalls a trait reported by Porphyry.[3]

The *Life of Proclus* by Marinos is a panegyric, an encomium of the exemplary Neoplatonic sage. The facts are forced, at whatever cost, into a systematic framework: the hierarchy of the Neoplatonic virtues — natural, moral, political, cathartic, contemplative, and finally theurgic or hieratic. The narrative is tasked with illustrating each degree. Moreover, everything lends itself to a symbolic reading. Thus the first mouthful of water swallowed by the young Proclus on his arrival in Attica is drawn from a fountain consecrated to Socrates. And the student presents himself at the gate of Athens at the very moment the gatekeeper was about to bolt

the entrance: 'In truth,' the latter said, 'if you had not come, I was on the point of shutting up.'[4] Which is to say that without this arrival of Proclus, the Platonic school of Athens would soon have been closed, and Plato's true thought sealed shut.

An example of the liberties Marinos takes with the facts emerges from the difficulty we have in knowing how many years Proclus lived. Was it 70, 73, or 75 years? According to the date of Proclus's death supplied by Marinos[1] — 17 April 485 — and according to the horoscope, likewise supplied by Marinos,[2] which has the Lycian born on 8 February 412, Proclus would have lived 73 years.[3] But Marinos declares to us on two occasions[4] that he lived 75 years. The strangest thing is that, in support of this assertion, he brings in nothing less than an apparition of Plutarch to Proclus in a dream, predicting that he would live as many years as he had composed tetrads on the *Chaldean Oracles*. Now Proclus counted seventy of these.

> 'That the dream was divine,' writes Marinos, 'is what the final outcome showed. For he lived 75 years, as we have said, but during the last 5 years he no longer had the same vigor' (οὐκ ἔτι ἐρρωμένως, lit. 'no longer vigorously/strongly').[5]

This reasoning is admirable, but it would just as well license subtracting the months spent at nurse. We see from this that the biographer is more interested in the figurative value of events than in their material accuracy.

Let us add to this that Marinos was doubtless a mind of average ability. Damascius, in his *Life of Isidore* (275), as reported by Photius, tells us that he had a 'sluggish nature' and that he did not understand the interpretation Proclus gave of the *Parmenides*. This was the decisive test of a good Neoplatonist. We find this same information in Suidas, in his notice on Marinos.

We may therefore conclude, without rashness, that Marinos bears a share of responsibility for the marvelous element that abounds in his *Life of Proclus*. But this does not resolve our problem. The biographer cannot have invented everything. What we know of the evolution of the Neoplatonic school since Iamblichus leads us to believe that Marinos did no more than amplify. Proclus deliberately defends theurgy, integrates it into his system, and theurgy is bound up with a certain marvelous element. He is thus, to a large extent, complicit.

The influence of the milieu, the literary genre of the panegyric, and Marinos's fervor are not sufficient explanations. And the question that arises is that of the unity of Proclus's personality. For he is often critical, and always systematic. Father Festugière calls him 'the Spinoza of Antiquity.' This is not untrue if one compares the *Elements of Theology* with the *Ethics*. But one cannot picture Spinoza cultivating divine apparitions. When his correspondent Hugo Boxel questions him about the sex of ghosts, he draws from him a reply full of irony.[1]

Are there, then, two Procluses — the thinker and the devotee? Father Festugière posed himself this question in two studies: *Proclos et la religion traditionnelle* [Proclus and Traditional Religion] and *Contemplation philosophique et art théurgique chez Proclus* [Philosophical Contemplation and Theurgic Art in Proclus].[2] Father Festugière's argument runs roughly as

follows. Proclus's devotion toward the gods is entirely sincere. It answers the need to relay the negative theology — austere and stripped bare — by means of a simple piety, naive and affective. It makes room for a collective and traditional experience. And besides, Proclus strives to integrate traditional mythology by means of his doctrine of the henads — those powers, as ineffable as he [the One] himself, yet each of which engenders a determinate series, as the *Platonic Theology* sets forth.

But one may wonder whether it is possible to allot naivety its portion and then set it aside — whether the theory of the henads grounds mythology or holds it at a distance — since the henads are enveloped within the negative theology and can manifest themselves only by giving themselves symbolic names. Father Festugière specifies that the junction between the divine emission and the worshipper is accomplished in the vehicle (ὄχημα, lit. 'vehicle, that which carries') or in the luminous envelope of the soul that perpetually underlies our empirical bodies. It is in this direction that one must look. And this comes down to asking about the mediations brought into play by a divine motion in order to manifest itself to the senses.

This is a question Proclus addresses often. Let us choose a few texts. In his *Commentary on the Republic* Proclus traces the conditions of divine apparitions.[3]

> 'For although the gods themselves are incorporeal, since the spectators have bodies, the visions which, issuing from the gods, present themselves to the sight of those worthy of them, possess at once something that comes from those who present them and something congenerate—congenerate (συγγενές, lit. 'akin in kind, of the same stock')—with the spectators. This is why they are seen, and are not seen, by all alike: for, to those who see them, they are seen by means of the luminous vestments of the soul (τοῖς αὐγοειδέσι τῶν ψυχῶν περιβλήμασιν, lit. 'by the radiant-formed wrappings of the souls') — indeed it is certain that they are often seen while the eyes are closed. Insofar, then, as they are extended (διαστατά, lit. 'having dimension, spread-out-ness') and appear in a likewise extended portion of the air, they arise congenerate with the spectators. But insofar as they cast a divine light, are endowed with efficacy, and, through the visible representation of the gods' symbols, reproduce the image of their powers, they depend on the very gods who present them. This is why the ineffable symbols of the gods receive a form (ἀποτυποῦται, lit. 'are stamped/imprinted into shape'), projecting now this figure (μορφήν), now that.'

In sum, the gods are incorporeal and therefore invisible. Yet they can raise up in us, who are corporeal, symbols of their power, which render them corporeal — and hence visible — for us. These divine figures manifest themselves in the luminous envelopes of souls, provided these envelopes have been purified by ascetic and theurgic practices. These envelopes are

neither purely spiritual (they could then perceive no figure at all) nor purely material (they could then perceive only empirical bodies acting from without). They are mediations between the soul and the earthly body, meant to insert the soul into the cosmos and enable it to fulfill a function there.[1]

Neither purely active, like the intellect, all of whose thoughts spring spontaneously from within, nor purely passive, like the external senses, which receive all their impressions from without, the luminous envelopes allow souls to give to themselves what they receive from the gods, by raising up within themselves figures that affect them according to their own dispositions, and by means of which they, so to speak, 'visualize' ineffable powers. The efficacy (τὸ δραστήριον, lit. 'the active/operative element') comes from the divine cause; the figuration (τὸ ἐσχηματισμένον, lit. 'the thing given shape, the figured') comes from the receiving being.[2]

This putting-into-figures is the work of the imagination (φαντασία), which has its seat in the first vehicle (ὄχημα).[3] The imagination, according to Proclus, is not a function charged with condensing and reproducing the deliverances of the external senses, but an activity that prolongs and transposes into figures the *a priori* unfolding of thought. Proclus distinguishes the sensibility that proceeds outward (ἔξω προϊοῦσα), which is passive and divides itself among the sense organs, from the sensibility that remains within (ἔνδον μένουσα) and which contemplates, in the *pneuma* (πνεῦμα), figures and schemata. This latter is immaterial, even while plunging into matter. It is pure, impassible, and one. This non-empirical, self-moving sensibility is the imagination, the source of the external senses. It is imagination that lends bodies to the gods.

Let us now read the few lines in which Proclus recapitulates his position in lapidary formulas.

> 'Every god is without figure, even if he is seen with a figure. For the figure is not in him, but proceeds from him, because the one who sees is incapable of seeing the figureless one without figure, but perceives him, according to his own nature as one who sees, figuratively.'[1]
>
> **Greek:** οὐ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ ἡ μορφή, ἀλλ᾽ ἀπ᾽ αὐτοῦ, μὴ δυναμένου τοῦ αὐτοπτοῦντος ἀμορφώτως ἰδεῖν τὸν ἀμόρφωτον, ἀλλ᾽ ὁρῶντος κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν μορφωτικῶς
>
> **Literal:** *For the form [is] not in it, but from it, since the one directly-beholding is not able formlessly to see the formless one, but sees [it] according to his own nature, formatively (i.e., by way of giving it form).*

Thus Proclus can maintain that a divine apparition is neither an illusion nor a hallucination, since at the point of departure there is an illumination or a divine motion — a presence that compensates for the image's character of absence. But it is in us that it takes on body, and through us that it becomes vision.

A little further on,[2] Proclus returns to this subject and writes:

> 'For while the participated god remains the same, the intellect participates in it one way, the discursive soul another way, the imagination another, and sense-perception yet another. The one participates indivisibly (ἀμερίστως), another diffusely (ἀνειλιγμένως, lit. 'in an unrolled/unfolded manner'), another figuratively (μορφωτικῶς), and another passively (παθητικῶς). And thus the participated remains in the oneness of its form (μονοειδές, lit. 'of a single form') as to its being, but it acquires a multiplicity of forms (πολυειδές, lit. 'of many forms') as to its participation.'

The process that accounts for apparitions can easily be transposed into the auditory domain, and can explain how theurgists hear divine words.

> 'Thus,' writes Proclus, 'because the primordial vehicle of souls possesses a general sensibility (τὴν κοινὴν αἴσθησιν, lit. 'the common sense-perception'), it is by nature capable of hearing what is not audible to mortal ears, and of seeing what is invisible to mortal sight.[3] For this vehicle is, in its entirety, capable of seeing and even of hearing. In it resides, indeed, in the primary sense, the sense-perception that is one and undivided (ἡ αἴσθησις ἡ μία καὶ ἀμερής, lit. 'the sense-perception, the one and partless [sense-perception]'), from which derive the sense-perceptions that fragment themselves among the organs of sense.'[4]

Since these sense organs bring 'less knowledge than ignorance,'[5] souls can hear themselves — and hear the daimons and the gods — thanks to their pre-empirical sensibility. In his *Commentary on the Alcibiades*,[6] Proclus strives to show how Socrates could hear the warnings of his daimon, which was of course without a voice.

> 'It is evident that, although this action of the daimon is always the same, reason enjoys its benefit in one way, the imagination in another, sense-perception in yet another. Each of our powers receives, in its own mode (ἰδίως, lit. 'properly, in its own particular way'), the impression and the motion of the daimon. It was not, then, by an impression undergone from outside that the voice struck Socrates; rather, it was from within that the intimation, having traversed the whole soul and having completed its course as far as the organs of sense, ended up becoming voice — known by inner co-perception rather than by ordinary perception. Such are the illuminations of good daimons and of gods.'

> **Greek:** οὐκ ἔξωθεν οὖν παθητικῶς ἡ φωνὴ τῷ Σωκράτει προσέβαλλεν, ἀλλ' ἔνδοθεν διὰ πάσης φοιτήσασα τῆς ψυχῆς ἡ ἐπίνοια καὶ μέχρι τῶν αἰσθητικῶν

> ὀργάνων διαδραμοῦσα, φωνὴ τελευτῶσα ἐγίνετο, συναισθήσει μᾶλλον ἢ αἰσθήσει γνωριζομένη
>
> **Literal:** *Not from outside, then, passively, did the voice strike upon Socrates; but from within, having passed through the whole of the soul, the thought/intuition, and having run through as far as the sense-perceiving organs, it ended by becoming a voice, being made known by co-perception [joint/inner awareness] rather than by [ordinary] sense-perception.*

Here the centrifugal process that issues in the hearing of the daimon appears more clearly — a process that inverts the centripetal process of Aristotelian abstraction. At the point of departure, an inspiration that touches the 'center' or 'the one of the soul,' the non-intellect (μὴ νοῦς, lit. 'that which is not intellect') deeper than intellect (νοῦς), and which spreads out from there through the whole soul, beginning with the highest powers. And each power reacts according to its own mode; each psychic level gives itself the manifestation that suits it. Finally, the inner sense fills itself with a kind of inward voice.

A divine communication, Proclus seems to say, cannot become conscious without filling the whole soul and without expressing itself all the way down into its lower powers. And since, for these lower powers, 'the felt' is the criterion of reality, the divine presence must become vision or audition. It acquires within the soul what it cannot possess in itself. There it unfolds an internal procession that follows the path of psychic self-constitution, from the simple to the complex, traversing all the intermediate degrees.

3. The Function of the Imagination

The principal intermediary between the divine inspiration, too simple, and its sensible manifestation, too complex, is the imagination. Proclus requires a symbolizing activity that expresses the ineffable in figures.

It is well known that, in Proclus's universe, the soul is mediation *par excellence*. He relies on the famous definition of the *Timaeus*, 35a (the mediation of indivisible and divisible substance), which Damascius would compare to the third hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (the soul joins the opposites within itself and holds them apart, both at once). Now if the soul is the mediation of the universe, the imagination, along with the discursive function, is the mediation of the soul.

It is above all in his *Commentary on the Elements of Euclid*, and in his study of mathematical knowledge, that Proclus develops his theory of the imagination.

> 'As for the imagination, which occupies the middle and center of the forms of knowledge (τὸ μέσον κέντρον τῶν γνώσεων, lit. 'the middle center of the acts of knowing'), it awakens of itself and projects its object; but because it is not outside the body, it brings its objects from indivision to division, to extension (διάστασιν) and to figure (σχῆμα). And for this reason, everything it thinks is an imprint (τύπος) and a form (μορφή) of an object of thought; it thinks the circle extensively

(διαστατῶς), keeping it free of external matter (τῆς ἐκτὸς ὕλης), yet retaining the intelligible matter (νοητὴν ὕλην) that is within it…'[1]

Every mediation, according to Proclus, both envelops and refuses, at once, the extremes it links.[2] So it is with the imagination. It is neither undivided, impassible thought, nor the division of passive impressions, but the passage from the one to the other — the exigency that carries the essentially projective, discursive function to affect itself through symbols.

'… It proceeds from the indivisible to the divided, and from what is without figure to the figured.'[3]

This formula can be completed by the following, more explicit description:

'For the imagination is a passive intellect that wishes to act within, but which has only a feeble power because of its fall into the third dimension.'[4]

> **Greek:** καὶ γὰρ ἡ φαντασία νοῦς τίς ἐστιν παθητικός, ἔνδον μὲν ἐνεργεῖν ἐθέλων, ἀσθενῶν δὲ διὰ τὴν εἰς τὸ στερεὸν πτῶσιν
>
> **Literal:** *For indeed imagination is a certain passive intellect, wishing on the one hand to be active within, but being weak on account of its fall into the solid [i.e., the three-dimensional, the corporeal].*

The imagination thus has the same characteristics as the first vehicle, which is neither immaterial nor material, but the passage from psychic intensity to somatic extension, without coinciding with either the one or the other.[5] Proclus always conceives this passage in a single direction — from top to bottom, from center to periphery. From this point of view he seems more idealist than Plotinus.[6] The imagination, in Proclus, is a power of schematizing *a priori*. It does not gather up the data of the external senses in order to condense and stylize them. It anticipates them.

It is not essentially reproductive; rather, it projects, in the form of figures, the substantial reasons of the soul. When Proclus calls it a 'passive intellect,' he means that the discursive activity becomes passive of itself through the imaginative schemata — not as a gratuitous game, but because it needs to unfold within an inner space in order to grasp itself by means of this detour.[1] This is what the formulas *nóēsis morphōtikḗ* (νόησις μορφωτική, lit. 'form-giving intellection')[2] and *noûs morphōtikós* (νοῦς μορφωτικός, lit. 'form-giving intellect')[3] suggest. And when Proclus also calls it 'common sense,' he does not mean that it is a unified sensibility, but rather the unitary principle behind the division of the external senses.[4]

It follows that our knowledge of geometrical extension is not obtained by abstraction from our external impressions, and that we do not derive numbers from extension by a further abstraction. The movement is the reverse of Aristotle's. Figures, being less rational than numbers, are derivatives of numbers,[5] which are themselves ratios. And the beings of nature are the images of mathematical reasons.[6] These, then, proceed from within.

According to the *Commentary on Euclid*,[7] the discursive soul projects them into the 'imaginal matter' (φανταστὴ ὕλη, lit. 'imaginative/phantasmal matter'), in order to contemplate its own substance in a mirror wherein it unfolds itself. For every mirror 'has an activity that is distance-making' (διαστηματικὴν ἔχει τὴν ἐνέργειαν, lit. 'it has its activity as dimensional/distance-generating').[8] It is a recoil, or a necessary circuit, for self-knowledge — but in no way narcissistic, since it is not a matter of the empirical individual, and the conversion toward oneself is indivisibly a conversion toward the divine.

The imagination contains a matter which, unlike that of things, furnishes an extension without extraposition, a division without separation, a movement akin to an ideal genesis.[9] Proclus distinguishes three circular figures: the discursive circle (which is not circular, since it is the idea of the circle), the circle of the imagination (which is perfectly circular), and the circle of nature (which is only an approximation). And he assigns to each of these circles a different space and a different movement.[10]

The soul then understands that it is neither one nor multiple, neither divided nor undivided, for the imagination unites opposites only in order to hold them at a distance.

What is paradoxical is that this imaginative fecundity, which produces mathematical reasons, likewise engenders those very different figures that are *myths*. But it has long been observed that mathematics and the arts share a common character: both are creations of symbols — stripped bare and rigorous on the one side, plethoric and incantatory on the other. They represent the two poles of human thought, and human thought lives from the relation between them. Myth, in fact, realizes in its own way the indivisible within the divided; it gives a body to the invisible and to the ineffable.

It belongs to spontaneous poetic activity. Now, among the Platonists, poetic creation has an origin deeper than reason, and even than thought. It springs from a kind of divine possession,[1] which, through the imagination of the poets, communicates itself to the rhapsodes and to their listeners.

> 'For poetic activity is found in a unitary and hidden mode in the one who imprints the first motion,[2] then in a second and unfolded mode in the poets moved by this monad, and finally in an instrumental mode in the rhapsodes, who are led back toward the causal unity through the mediation of the poets.'[3]

Thus the highest poetic activity diffuses itself, corresponding to the soul's deepest life — that in which it enjoys the grip of the Ineffable.[4] It demands that myth be put to a 'mystical' or 'telestic' use, rather than a merely 'pedagogical' one. The latter is only a propaedeutic that awakens the minds of the young, whereas the former procures 'contact with the divine.'[5] Myth then becomes 'a sacred and symbolic invocation' preparing an evocation.[6]

In this case, myth possesses an efficacy superior to that of mathematics. To be sure, it is heavier than numbers. The imagination unfolds there without constraint, and its descent into the sensible is deeper. The gods of mythology do not move within geometrical space, and

they are animated by passions unknown to mathematical reasons. But Proclus holds that these very characteristics secure for myth a power over the whole man that mathematics does not obtain.

For myth extends from one extreme to the other — from the divine to matter, from the ineffable by excess to the ineffable by deficiency, from the 'sanctuary' to the 'abyss.' And in myth these opposites, far from excluding one another, reinforce each other.

In this kind of symbol, the sensible is entirely recovered by the mystical and perfectly purified. From then on, the stranger — even the more violent — the figure, the more surely it will awaken divine inspiration in the soul that is duly prepared. We know the use Proclus makes of this principle to justify those myths of Homer — the wars and loves of the gods, for example — which Plato judged unseemly.

> 'The symbolic doctrine indicates the nature of things precisely by means of the most extreme opposites.'[1]

This mode of expression conforms to the law of universal procession.

> 'The first mythmakers, having understood that nature — which fashions images of the immaterial and intelligible Ideas, and which fills this visible world with their varied imitations — figures the indivisibles by means of the divided, the eternal beings by means of temporal processions, and the intelligibles by means of the sensibles; figuring, in an extended manner, the unextended, and, by means of change, that which is established in immutability — these authors, then, following nature and the procession of visible reflections, likewise imitate her, fashioning images cast in the expressions most opposed to, and furthest removed from, the divine beings. They signify — by what is contrary to the sovereign power of the exemplars, that power itself; by what, in the gods, surpasses reason, that which is contrary to reason; by images of ugliness, that which is more divine than all reason; by images of simplicity, that which surpasses in simplicity every partial beauty. It is thus that, by a normal procedure, they give us a reminiscence of the gods' transcendent sovereign excellence.'[2]

Translator's note: This sentence is unusually dense and elliptical even in Trouillard's French (no Greek is quoted alongside it in the original, so none is given here); I have preserved its parallel 'by X, [they signify] Y' structure as closely as English allows, supplying 'that power itself' in brackets to complete the first, elliptical clause.

Just as the genesis of mathematics illuminates that of myth, so the genesis of myth illuminates that of the prodigy. Between the one and the other there is a formative exchange. Myth gives the prodigy its meaning; the prodigy, in turn, gives myth back its actualization. Their bond is the *theurgic rite*, which is the symbol in act. The subject unfolds its expressive activity all the way to the rite; in the prodigy it feels that activity's shock in return. Thus the

circuit is completed; the loop is closed. The procession, having become integral, accomplishes itself in an integral conversion.

Pursuing these reflections further, we would rejoin the optimistic thesis of matter that Proclus holds from Iamblichus, and which distances him from Plotinus. Matter is not essentially evil, since it is precisely its essential opposition to the One that constitutes the best of the expressions of the One.

> 'For matter is neither being nor becoming, since it is graspable neither by thought nor by sensation — and the One likewise, as Parmenides shows for both: for the latter in the first hypothesis, for the former in the fifth.'[1]

The correspondence between the first and the fifth hypothesis, in the Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Parmenides*, thus justifies the evocation of the One by matter. Likewise, the correspondence between the second and the fourth hypothesis grounds the evocation of the gods by their figures. And such is the role played by the soul, which, in the third hypothesis, totalizes these antitheses.

Numbers, myths, and marvels thus diversely express the activity of the imagination, which is neither illusory nor purely gratuitous. This is why there are sacred and theurgic numbers, which gather within themselves all the functions of the imagination.

We may now, therefore, answer the question we posed at the outset. Proclus is not double. There is no credulous Proclus unaware of the critical Proclus. His principles or postulates being what they are, he has fully integrated his taste for the marvelous into his philosophical procedure. He has analyzed the process by which the soul tells itself of the divine presence.

Jean Trouillard

Footnotes (as in the original, renumbered per printed page)

p. 439 — 1. Life of Plotinus, 10. 2. Ibid. 3. Enneads, III, 4.

p. 440 — 1. Ibid., III, 1. 2. Ibid., II, 3. 3. Life of Proclus, 32. 4. Ibid., 31. 5. Ibid., 19. 6. Ibid., 20. 7. Ibid., 28. 8. L'Antiquité classique, vol. XXIX, 1960, pp. 108–133 and 391–406. See also Saffrey–Westerink, Théologie platonicienne [Platonic Theology] of Proclus, vol. I, Paris, 1968, p. xxix (introduction).

p. 441 — 1. Life of Proclus, 29. 2. Ibid., 6. 3. Ibid., 30 (trans. Festugière). An allusion to the transformation of the Parthenon into a Christian church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, honored as the seat of wisdom. 4. Ibid., 7. 5. Ibid., 30. A similar trait in the Life of Plotinus, 2: the sage dies because he wills it. 6. Ibid., 32. 7. Information kindly communicated by Fr. Saffrey.

p. 442 — 1. Life of Proclus, 28. 2. Ibid., 23. 3. Life of Plotinus, 13. 4. Life of Proclus, 10.

p. 443 — 1. Ibid., 36. 2. Ibid., 35. 3. Cf. Étienne Évrard, 'La date de la naissance de Proclus le Néo-Platonicien' [The Date of the Birth of Proclus the Neoplatonist], L'Antiquité classique, vol. XXIX, 1960, pp. 137–140. 4. Life of Proclus, 3 and 26. 5. Ibid., 26.

p. 444 — 1. Letter 54. 2. Published in Études de philosophie grecque [Studies in Greek Philosophy], Paris, 1971. 3. Kroll [ed.], vol. I, pp. 39–40, trans. Festugière.

p. 445 — 1. In Timaeum, ed. Diehl, III, 298.12–16. 2. In Cratylum, ed. Pasquali, 31.16–17. 3. In Timaeum, III, 286.18–287.10.

p. 446 — 1. In Rempublicam, I, 40.1–4. 2. Ibid., III, 19–25. A more detailed account is found in In Rempublicam, II, 241.19–243.27. 3. In Rempublicam, I, 167.20–23. 4. Ibid., 154.26–155.2. 5. Ibid., 164.16–17. 6. Westerink [ed.], 80.11–18.

p. 448 — 1. In Euclidem, ed. Friedlein, 52.20–53.1. 2. In Timaeum, III, 215.21–23. 3. In Euclidem, 95.1–2. 4. In Rempublicam, I, 52.6–8. 5. In Rempublicam, II, 163.5; In Timaeum, III, 287.9. 6. Cf. the study by E. Moutsopoulos, Τὸ πρόβλημα τοῦ φανταστικοῦ παρὰ Πλωτίνῳ [The Problem of the Imaginative/Phantastic in Plotinus], Athens, 1969, p. 152.

p. 449 — 1. In Euclidem, 52.3ff.; 54.27–55.23; 141.2–142.7. 2. In Rempublicam, I, 235.19. 3. In Cratylum, 76.26. 4. In Timaeum, III, 286.20–29. 5. In Euclidem, 61.7–8. 6. In Timaeum, II, 39.18; 141.2–142.7. 7. In Euclidem, 55.5. 8. In Parmenidem, IV, ed. Cousin, 1864, col. 840.24. 9. In Euclidem, 186.8–187.3. 10. Ibid., 53.22–25. Cf. Stanislas Breton, Proclos et les mathématiques, Paris, 1969.

p. 450 — 1. Proclus refers above all to the Ion and the Phaedrus. 2. The inspiring god. 3. In Rempublicam, I, 184.2–6. 4. Ibid., 177.15–23; 178.10–179.3. 5. Ibid., 80.11; 81.14–16. 6. Ibid., 84.25–26.

p. 451 — 1. Ibid., 198.18–19. 2. Ibid., 17.13–28.

p. 452 — 1. In Timaeum, I, 256.9–13. Cf. In Alcibiadem, 189.18.